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## **STATE LEGISLATORS DON'T GIVE A DAM ABOUT THE CT RIVER VALLEY** Ban on Trapping Threatens Integrity of Connecticut River Flood Protection Dikes

West Hartford, CT. (March 26, 2009) – State Legislators may soon be voting on a controversial measure to ban certain kinds of traps in Connecticut, including traps currently used by wildlife professionals to control burrowing animals in the Connecticut River levee system. The Connecticut Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators Association, Inc. (CTNWCO Assoc., Inc.) expressed alarm at this proposal, citing millions of dollars in repairs to the levee system attributed to wildlife problems over the past several years. The same Legislators considering this ban have already allocated millions of taxpayer dollars to protect the safety and property of residents in the areas of these levees. “We are deeply concerned about the state’s ability to continue to keep the population levels of these animals in check without these vital tools,” said Tom Logan, Vice President and spokesman for the CTNWCO Association. The General Assembly’s Environment Committee recently approved a bill co-sponsored by Hartford state Senator John Fonfara and Plainville Representative Elizabeth “Betty” Boukus to ban foothold and Conibear traps in the state.

According to Nick Casparino, a Civil Engineer for the town of East Hartford, the town last year alone paid a private contractor \$4 million to repair nearly four miles of town-owned dikes that protect it from the Connecticut River. The town has allocated \$25 million to rehabilitating the dike system. Casparino said that more than \$58,000 has been paid to the contractor so far for controlling and repairing wildlife damage to the dike system, but the project is still ongoing. Mr. Casparino said that the US Army Corps of Engineers is requiring an ongoing program to control wildlife and remediate the damage caused by wildlife, which is very extensive since they must bring in heavy equipment every time an animal burrows into the earthen dike.

According to a 2005 report on the state’s dams, “Dam Safety in Connecticut”, compiled by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection’s Bureau of Water Management, Connecticut had 22 deficient dams in 2004. The US Army Corps of Engineers’ 2007 report on National Inventory of Dams indicated that there are 468 earthen dams in Connecticut, representing 64% of the 723 dams in the state. This report also indicated that 62% of the dams are privately owned, and 18% are owned by local governments. Wesley Marsh of the bureau of Water Management stated, “It will be hard to tell a private levee owner that they need to remedy a wildlife issue, then have the wildlife department tell them that they cannot trap the animal. Especially if they had a trapper previously managing the beaver population for no charge.”

According to USA Today's December 22, 2008 article, "Most Levee Repairs Lagging", the US Army Corps of Engineers indicated that the worst offenders are Washington and California, where levees with "unacceptable maintenance deficiencies" protect densely populated cities like Seattle and Sacramento. While Connecticut has recently provided \$5 million to improve Hartford's levees, no one knows how this trapping ban will affect the cost of repairing the levees in the future. One has to wonder if it will even be feasible to perform the repairs without being able to use the proper tools, such as traps, to control the burrowing animals causing the damage. If the repairs are delayed, the US Army Corps of Engineers could bar access to recovery funds, should there be a catastrophe. Tom Logan, Vice President of the Connecticut Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators Association, Inc., states, "The state lawmakers need to look at the overall picture of this ban on trapping, and look at where these tools can be used effectively to manage wildlife to protect human interests. How will a muskrat or beaver that is burrowing into a levee be caught without these tools being available anymore? It's ironic that the two states that are the worst offenders are states that ban these traps."

According to Dan Marks, a civil engineer and a consultant of the Association of State Dam Safety Officials, burrowing animals like muskrats and beavers are the two most common wildlife species to cause structural damage. Muskrats burrow into the levees and weaken their integrity. Beavers obstruct spillways, burrow into the levee, and move mud and material to create their own dams. Mr. Marks says that water level devices are not a good option since they are expensive to install and maintain. He stated that last year in June a muskrat had undermined a repaired water-saturated levee that was holding back the relentless Mississippi River in eastern Missouri. The town residents had worked for several days to maintain the levee from the rising waters. This only affected about 100 homes, but the levee was protecting an area of about 3,000 acres, and the damage happened when everyone was sleeping.

Muskrats and beaver aren't the only wildlife causing damage to dikes.

"How can we control moles that are eroding the surface of these levees?" asked Richard Daniotti, owner of Wildlife Control Services of West Hartford. "These lawmakers are supposed to look out for the environment and the people. Yet if they ban the use of traps, they will only cause more poisons to be absorbed into the environment, including our waterways." Daniotti also pointed to the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) technical manual for wildlife control professionals to use in managing these animals, "FEMA highly recommends these same traps that the state lawmakers are trying to ban."

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's Deputy Commissioner, Susan Frechette, testified at the environmental lawmakers hearing on March 9<sup>th</sup> in opposition to the trap ban, citing a detrimental impact on wildlife management. She testified that if the traps are banned under the proposed legislation, the most effective, and for some species, the only effective tool, will no longer be available to wildlife control professionals. Senator Edward Meyer of Guilford responded to Deputy Commissioner during the hearing by saying, "I am appalled that the department is condoning the use of these traps"

The Connecticut Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators Association is a non-profit organization to promote general standards and ethics as well as foster education, research, and knowledge within the nuisance wildlife control industry.

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